

25 March 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Chief of Staff/Operations  
Headquarters, U. S. Air Force

SUBJECT : Air Force Support of Project AQUATONE

1. Purpose of this memorandum: It is understood to be the view of the Air Staff that Air Force support for Project AQUATONE in its operational phase should be the responsibility of the Strategic Air Command. Assistance and support in research, development, and procurement will, however, continue to be the responsibility of the Deputy Chief of Staff/Development. The purpose of this memorandum is to set forth various kinds of support that will be required, to outline the organization which is proposed to handle the project within the CIA, and to indicate proposed relationships between the CIA and the Air Force.

2. Basic Concept of the Project: In all of its phases, including development, procurement and testing of material, training of personnel and actual conduct of overflight missions, AQUATONE has been conceived of as a clandestine intelligence gathering operation to be conducted in such a way as to minimize the risk of detection and of plausible attribution to the U. S. Government. The initial policy decision to proceed with the project was made on this basis.

Knowledge of the project will be limited to the narrowest possible circle of those who need to know. The circle would be widened dangerously if staff elements at several levels in a long chain of command had to be included. Largely for this reason, the project has been organized outside of established command channels in both the CIA and the Air Force. Activities which appear unusual and which it therefore becomes necessary to explain, either to unwitting individuals within the Government or to others, will be associated with development of a high altitude test bed. In accordance with this basic concept, it will be important to minimize the appearance of military activity especially in the actual conduct of operations overseas.

3. Assumptions as to the Character of the Operation:

a. Operations will be conducted from two to four rear bases, at each of which there will have to be provision for the maintenance of aircraft and of photographic and electronic equipment, the storage and handling of specialized supplies, the housing of personnel, and possibly other functions.

USAF review(s) completed.

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b. As a rule, actual missions will be flown from forward staging bases, or else reconnaissance aircraft will be towed by other aircraft and released close to the enemy's border. Provision will have to be made, therefore, for the operational use of suitable large transport aircraft and of other aircraft capable of towing the reconnaissance vehicle.

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4. Assumptions as to Procurement:

a. The CIA is procuring airframes, photographic reconnaissance equipment, electronic search gear, specialized communications equipment, spares for the above, specialized field maintenance equipment, specialized ground handling equipment, and specialized supplies such as photographic film and electronic tape.

b. The USAF will procure GFE including especially engines, spare parts therefor and certain standard photographic reconnaissance equipment (to be modified for use in this project).

c. Responsibility for the procurement of non-specialized supplies, including fuel, standard ground handling equipment, and maintenance material will be divided between the Air Force and the CIA on the basis of convenience and security.

5. CIA Organization and Functions: Within the CIA a Project Organization has been established which will consist eventually of a Project Headquarters in Washington and three Special Detachments in the field, each located at a particular rear base. The Project Headquarters will exercise control over operations through a line of command that will run directly to the field detachments. The Headquarters will be responsible specifically for operational planning

(with the assistance of the Air Force), for the clearance of policies and of operational plans with other departments and with higher authority to ensure conformity to national policy, and for the coordination of operations and the allocation and movement of personnel and materiel among the field detachments. The Project Headquarters will also be responsible, with the assistance of the Air Force, for continuing development, procurement and recruitment activities in connection with this Project. The Field Detachments will be responsible for the final determination of specific flight plans within the limits of a general plan of operations and subject to specific Headquarters instructions, for the actual conduct of missions, and for the maintenance of primary mission aircraft. Through this Project Organisation the CIA will perform the following specific functions:

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b. Secure and administer maintenance personnel for primary mission aircraft (including engines) and for photographic reconnaissance and electronic search equipment. These will be suppliers' employees furnished by them under contract. The CIA will also procure from suppliers specialized maintenance and ground handling equipment.

c. Maintain communications through CIA channels between the Headquarters and field detachments;

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d. Maintain security control over all aspects of the project including the investigation of all knowledgeable individuals, arranging for or monitoring security arrangements at suppliers' plants, at a test base to be established, and at overseas bases.

e. In conjunction with the Director of Intelligence, USAF, A-2, SAC, and other intelligence components as appropriate, assemble reconnaissance objectives, determine priorities between objectives, and assemble intelligence on enemy detection facilities and air defense order of battle. This task is already well advanced.

6. Required Air Force Support: The CIA will require extensive Air Force support to enable the project to be carried out in a professional manner and to ensure against any attempted duplication of skills and facilities presently available in the Air Force. The principal forms in which the support will be required will be the following:

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a. Continued administrative and technical assistance in development and procurement, together with substantial Air Force procured materiel (as listed in paragraph 4b above). This support includes the benefit of the judgment of experienced Air Force specialists in R&D, materiel, and aeromedical sections.

b. The services of [ ] Air Force Officers who can be assigned to the Project Organization and help in the actual conduct of operations. This number should probably include [ ] men who can serve as operational planners at headquarters and as operations officers overseas, [ ] intelligence officers, [ ] aeromedical officers, and [ ] meteorologists.

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c. Assistance of the Operational Planning Group, SAC, in developing operational plans. It is anticipated that much of the materiel required for reconnaissance target folders will be readily available at SAC headquarters and that with the assistance of this materiel and of the SAC planners, only a small operational planning group will be required at CIA Project Headquarters.

d. Operational support aircraft, together with their air crews and provision for their maintenance. There will probably be a requirement for: two to three aircraft equipped to tow primary mission aircraft and six to ten transport aircraft (C-124's and C-54's), to permit the rapid movement of personnel and materiel into and out of staging bases. The precise numbers will depend upon the operational concept finally developed. These aircraft should not have military insignia and their crews will be fully witting of the character of the missions being flown by primary mission aircraft. Accordingly, aircraft and crews should be assigned to field detachments on a continuing basis with a minimum of rotation to other assignments.

e. The use of facilities and Air Force bases abroad [ ]

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f. A variety of supporting services during the operational phase, including transportation of personnel and materiel to and between bases, current intelligence, weather information, and probably some housekeeping.

7. Channels for Air Force Support: It is assumed (as stated in paragraph 1, above) that these various kinds of support will be provided in the main through two channels, which will however be supplemented by several established contacts.

a. The CIA Project Organization will continue to look to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff/Development for support listed in paragraph 6a, above; that is, assistance in development and procurement, including Air Force procurement of engines, other GFE, personnel equipment, and other items as may be agreed. It is understood that

this office will continue to coordinate supporting activities of the materiel and supply sections of the Air Staff and of the Surgeon General's office.

b. The Project Organization will look to a unit to be established or designated in the Strategic Air Command for support listed under paragraphs 6c, d, and e, above; that is, for operational support aircraft, facilities at USAF bases, and supporting services including current intelligence and weather. It is presumed that where such support should be provided by other commands, SAC will arrange for it as necessary, notably for transportation by MATS.

c. The CIA will look to SAC for the majority of the officers required as indicated under paragraph 6b, above, but may as agreed secure certain specialists from other components, such as aeromedical officers from the Surgeon General. A number of officers have already been assigned to the project and will continue with it.

d. Existing channels between the CIA and AFOIN and to other intelligence components will continue to be used in the assembly of intelligence on enemy means of detection and defenses, and on reconnaissance objectives.

e. Arrangements for the basic training of civilian pilots recruited by the CIA for this project will be made directly by the [redacted] of CIA with the Air Training Command, USAF in accordance with established procedure.

5. Physical and Administrative Arrangements for Liaison: To enable business to be transacted efficiently through these channels, the following arrangements are suggested:

a. It is assumed that the present Project Officer will continue to be the point of contact with the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff/Development.

b. Presumably the Commanding General, SAC will form a unit in SAC Headquarters or designate an existing unit in SAC to be the point of contact with the CIA Project Organization and to arrange for support by SAC. Considerations of security will require that other than the members of this unit (which should itself be of minimum size) only an absolute minimum number of officers in SAC be knowledgeable of AQUATONE.

c. Since the Project Headquarters will be in Washington, it will be necessary for the supporting unit in SAC to maintain a liaison office in Washington. The Officer in charge should have the largest feasible delegation of authority to enable him to deal with CIA and to make or obtain decisions with the least possible delay.

d. It would be highly desirable to have the Project Officer under the Deputy Chief of Staff/Development and the SAC liaison office physically housed together and it may turn out to be desirable to have them located at the Project Headquarters.

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Project AQUATONE